

To: House Transportation Committee, September 12, 2006
From: Traffic Safety Center of Southwest Michigan
% Robin & Monte Bordner
Comments and concerns for Senate Bill 1290

I have been involved with Driver Education, Driver Improvement, Traffic Safety, and Driver Education Instructor Training since the early 1980's in the state of Michigan and around the country. I am fully aware that we are about to experience the most positive change and improvement in Driver Education that has ever occurred. I was honored to have been invited to work on the Driver Education advisory committee by Secretary of State Land. A group of dedicated traffic safety professionals worked through the past year to assist in the development of the recommendations that went into Senate Bill 1290.

The recommendations address many needed improvements in the teen driver education curriculum, the instructor preparation programs, the road testing arena, and overall driver improvement for all teens in Michigan. As road test examiners, my husband and I see on a daily basis, the product of poor driver education programs. We see this occurring because of a lack in oversight of the programs, inconsistent instructor preparation and a lack of professional development requirements for instructors in this discipline. Private driving schools have taken on the task of providing Driver Education in this state and we are seeing a shift from quality education to business oriented financial outcomes.

With the loss of the public school driver education funding the financial responsibility has been shifted to the parents or guardians of the teens. With this shift in the funding the families are paying for instruction with the expectation that they will receive a quality product and that is not necessarily the case with the current lack of a complete curriculum with quality instruction. This legislation (SB 1290) set the standards and requirements that will more likely meet the family's expectations of a more competent teen driver that understands the responsibility of the overall driving task.

There is a cost for quality and additional behind-the-wheel hours that have demonstrated in our Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) process a reduction in crashes and violations for specific age groups. Parents and families have accepted the responsibility of the 50 hours of behind-the-wheel supervised driving. Therefore the question is, "Does the additional (minimal) cost of a behind-the-wheel component in Segment II Driver Education exceed the value of placing better prepared teen drivers on the road?" We would advocate the cost is an excellent value.

We currently have access to a national set of standards that prescribe classroom and integrated behind-the-wheel instruction components in both Segment I and Segment II Driver Education. Michigan is the only state even close to following these standards as we require the two segment program as part of our Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL system). The national curriculum strongly recommends the behind-the-wheel phase in both Segments. This legislation gives us the opportunity to stay in line with the standards and demonstrate leadership.

We would rather remain the leader in traffic safety rather than traffic fatalities? We firmly believe the additional behind the-wheel component in the Segment II course would assist the families in skill development, poor habit reduction, and overall better decision making for our beginner drivers with the cost being a minimal factor to both the provider and the parents. We support this component in this legislation.

Thank you,
Robin & Monte Bordner
Sturgis, Michigan
Traffic Safety Center of Southwest Michigan